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STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
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Agenda item 5 (a)
SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

Measures taken following the cyclones and floods that have affected Madagascar

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1994/36 of 29 July 1994 adopted following consideration of the report of the Secretary-General relating to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 48/234 of 14 February 1994 on emergency assistance to Madagascar. 1/ In that resolution, appeals were made to the international community to assist the Government of Madagascar in successfully completing the recovery efforts to mitigate the damage caused by floods and cyclones in Madagascar.

2. In resolution 1994/36, the Council requested the Secretary-General: (a) with the participation of organizations of the United Nations, to evaluate further the extent of the damage caused by the cyclones and floods and to assess the medium- to long-term impact of the disasters on the national economy; (b) to compile information that could be used to promote a concerted international assistance effort; (c) to communicate the results of that investigation to the international community; (d) to take necessary measures to assist the Government in preparing a reconstruction and rehabilitation programme in the affected

* A/50/50/Rev.1.

regions and sectors; and (e) to report on the implementation of that resolution to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1995 and to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session.

II. ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

A. Measures taken following cyclones and floods in Madagascar

3. The northern part of Madagascar is particularly vulnerable to frequent cyclones. The material damage inflicted by cyclones may exceed 10 per cent of the country's gross national product (GNP). In 1993 and 1994, the country was repeatedly hit by cyclones and floods that caused major human and material loss. The international community organized relief assistance for victims of natural disasters in instances where the extent of the damage exceeded the national relief capacity.

4. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, at the request of the Government of Madagascar, had previously undertaken a project of technical assistance for the country (MAG/84/014 - Strengthening the government intervention capacity in case of natural human disasters) at a cost of US$ 400,000 funded under Madagascar's United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicative planning figure.

5. The project, undertaken jointly by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat and UNDP from 1987 to 1993, was aimed at creating a network of regional disaster relief and mitigation centres for provinces most affected by cyclones, with centres in Sambava, Mahajanga, Toamasina and Antsirana, as well as one in Antananarivo, the capital of the country. These centres were equipped with materials for emergency relief and for hazard monitoring. For these regional centres, the project provided consultant expertise and services, together with a United Nations Volunteer (UNV) for a duration of four years. The project consultants, in collaboration with national specialists from the ministries concerned, assessed the country's disaster relief/mitigation capacity, and coordinated the training of technical personnel. In each of the provinces two to three workshops were organized with approximately 40 persons each for project-related activities. A two-week training seminar was also organized in La Reunión, for 50 Malagasy fellows who represented authorities/ministries of internal affairs, planning, meteorological services and relief and mitigation services from four provinces. As a sign of commitment to the project, the Government provided each designated province with a building to serve as a stockpile centre. The project was planned to be used as a model for creating other regional disaster relief and mitigation centres in the country.

6. At the request of the Resident Representative of UNDP in Madagascar, the ongoing project was revised and its budget raised from US$ 400,000 to US$ 775,000. It now also includes food security issues. The implementation of the revised project was assured jointly by WFP (WFP) and UNDP.

7. Since all regional centres were located in the northern part of the country, which is most frequently exposed to tropical cyclones, the Government

in 1990 requested the formulation of a strategy for disaster preparedness and mitigation specifically geared towards the southern part of the country where natural hazards are of a different nature. These include, for example, desertification, deforestation, bush and step fire, heavy rains and cyclones, storm winds, soil and coastal erosion and fluctuation of ground water. A Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat consultant prepared the requisite technical report, which was submitted to the Government in 1991. (A copy of the report is available upon request from the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat.)

8. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat's approach, based on the organization of regional disaster relief centres, staff training and stockpiling of relief materials for mitigation and emergency operations, turned out to be very viable in the current economic situation of the country. Considering that these regional centres were also given the responsibility of monitoring food situations and carrying out food relief operations, the development of a network of such centres appears very appropriate. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat's findings concerning the organization of disaster relief and mitigation were made known to the Government and the UNDP Resident Representative in the country. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat proposed further support by other United Nations agencies to promote disaster mitigation and planning as a basis for sustainable economic and social development.

9. In 1995 Madagascar was spared cyclones similar to those that caused a major disaster in 1994. Accordingly no state of emergency was declared during that period. However, activities geared towards the strengthening of national emergency capacity and reconstruction have continued throughout 1994 and 1995.

B. National fund for natural disasters

10. In order to meet the costs relating to rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in the aftermath of cyclones and floods, the Government of Madagascar has established a national fund for this purpose. However, the size of the Fund for recovery from emergency situations (US$ 75,000) is rather modest. At the local level, the provision is reserved for the social repercussions of disasters, and has to constitute at least 15 per cent of the budget of the affected community.

11. In addition, Madagascar, through donor support, has established a national highways fund, solely for the reconstruction of highway infrastructure damaged by natural disasters. For 1995, an amount of 1.3 million Malagasy francs was set aside; 60 per cent provided by the State and 40 per cent by European Development Fund (EDF). A programme for the regular maintenance of the highway infrastructure has also been implemented. A similar proposal has been made for the maintenance of public buildings.

12. Clearly, the Government of Madagascar at this time lacks the resources and the capacity to undertake an immediate and coherent emergency response and requires the continuing support of the international community. Apart from

stocks of fuel in the capital city, the national authorities have no physical buffer stocks that can be used in crisis situations or for reconstruction.

C. Disaster-monitoring

13. The Government of Madagascar has taken a number of steps to compile data on natural disasters systematically. The National Office for the Environment has published a history of natural disasters in Madagascar, indicating the most affected areas and the extent of damage in each area. A monitoring and information network, funded by EDF, has also been established in specific regions in order to forecast and monitor natural disasters. The United Nations is assisting the Government in strengthening its capacity for early warning and has provided emergency equipment and other technical support for these activities.

D. Soil conservation activities

14. In order to promote the conservation, development and restoration of cultivated areas, the Government, supported by the World Bank, has initiated a project that specifically addresses these issues. This project acknowledges the realignment of the policies of the United Nations and the World Bank as regards the agricultural restoration of cultivated areas.

E. Rice information system

15. A statistical information system has been established to monitor the availability of rice, the staple food of Madagascar. For lack of resources, the system has, however, not always been able to provide relevant information.

III. CONCLUSION

16. In spite of all these efforts, Madagascar remains vulnerable to the impact of natural disasters. The main factor is lack of resources, which has also constrained adequate reconstruction and rehabilitation of the cyclone- and flood-affected areas. Resource limitations have, in addition, also affected the development of effective coordination and management of relief and reconstruction activities. UNDP and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat have continued to assist the Government in two basic areas: in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of affected areas and in strengthening the national capacity for early warning and response, coordination and disaster relief management. As a part of the latter, disaster management training programmes have been organized for national officials to manage the emergency response units and to strengthen existing frameworks.

17. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs, working with all involved parties, will undertake a review in 1995 to evaluate disaster management policy plans at the country level. The outcome of this exercise will enable the Government to seek further funding, which remains of critical importance.

Notes

1/ E/1994/66.